



COMMUNICATIONS

by Ken Reitz KS4ZR

Communications is compiled and edited by Ken Reitz KS4ZR (kenreitz@monitoring-times.com) based on clippings and links provided by our readers. Many thanks to this month's fine reporters: Anonymous, Bob Grove, Norm Hill, Lynn Kelly, Steve Karnes, and Larry Van Horn.

BBG Shambles

The U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee held a hearing at the end of June to examine the conclusions of two government reports that described the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) as "plagued by infighting" and "dysfunctional." BBG is a quasi-governmental organization charged with overseeing the operations of Voice of America, Radio Liberty, Radio Free Europe and Radio Free Asia as well as Radio and TV-Martí, among others. Opinions of several former BBG officials, voiced during the hearings, clashed on whether or not the BBG was, in fact, dysfunctional or if oversight of BBG should be returned to the State Department.

Private, non-partisan BBG watchdog, the Committee for U.S. International Broadcasting (CUSIB), released a statement following the hearings noting there was no consensus on "how to achieve real reforms at the BBG." CUSIB rejected the idea of putting BBG back in the State Department, noting that, "in our view [it] would destroy all effectiveness and credibility of U.S. international broadcasting and would become a public diplomacy disaster for the United States." The statement noted that BBG had, "woefully insufficient funding to compete with nations such as China and Russia. It is unable to offer good-quality news programming to Iran..."

CUSIB recommended that Congress review the \$50 million contract with the Gallup organization and what it termed, "other wasteful spending within the International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB) which uses up the largest portion of the BBG budget. We believe taxpayers' money should be spent on media programs rather than the overblown bureaucracy which contributes to low employee morale."

Public Safety Radio Follies

An article in the *Las Vegas Sun* from June 18 headlined, "Metro Drops Maligned Radio System, Inks Deal for New One," highlighted the continuing issues with that city's police and fire radio system. According to the article, the Sheriff's Department is scuttling the Desert Sky system due to, "a high number of dropped calls and dead zones." The new contract is with Motorola Solutions in a \$26.3 million deal which will provide 5,000 portable and mobile radios to the various public service departments. A Las Vegas Assistant Sheriff was quoted as saying, "...we are confident Motorola will deliver a successful...radio system..."

The Las Vegas Sheriff's Department's faith in Motorola Systems might be premature. Detroit's Chief of Police was appalled with that city's Motorola emergency dispatch system which was out of commission for 15 hours over the Fourth of July holiday. According to

the *Detroit News*, the system crash delayed of-ficers responding to 17 priority-one calls and 110 non-priority calls and forced police and firefighters to respond to calls via telephone. It wasn't as if they didn't have a backup system. It was the backup that failed when the main system crashed. According to the article, "The city's \$131 million police and fire dispatch system has been controversial since it was launched... in 2005."

Meanwhile, the city of Scottsbluff, South Dakota, is looking to move its fire and safety repeater to get better coverage. At the current location, according to a story on local TV station, KOTA-TV, emergency crews experience a number of dead spots, including, believe it or not, the Regional West Medical Center.

Cubesat Grads Cash-In

An article in the July issue of *Wired* details the rise of Skybox, a Silicon Valley startup that plans to launch a constellation of small satellites designed to provide inexpensive high-resolution images of Earth to clients. According to the article, company founders learned their trade at Stanford University working on cubesats, those four-inch by four-inch, short-lifespan satellites that teach students how to build and fly such devices.

Skybox satellites, at 220 pounds, are definitely not cubesats, but with a predicted lifespan of four years and coming in at one-tenth the cost of traditional high-resolution imaging satellites, Skybox hopes it will carve a new niche in the commercial satellite imagery business. But, don't let the California college-kid images fool you; some company founders have ties to the ultra-secretive National Reconnaissance Office as well as Wall Street, too-big-to-fail, banks.

UHD-TV via Satellite Tested

Several media outlets reported that Intelsat and Ericsson successfully demonstrated the first Ultra High Definition-TV (UHD-TV) transmission over a North American satellite at the end of June. UHD-TV images are 3,840 x 2,160 pixels making it roughly four times the resolution of the current HDTV standard. Viewed on a 55 or 65-inch screen, the images are truly stunning.



The test was done at Turner Broadcasting facilities in Atlanta, Georgia, using Intelsat Galaxy 13. UHD-TV is not 3D-TV, the format requiring viewers to watch with special glasses. UHD-TV is seen as the next step in broadcasting higher definition imagery. Sources say, however, that the number of high-ticket sets expected to be sold will remain very small over the next three years with most such sets being sold in China.

2013 ARRL Scholarships Awarded

The ARRL Foundation announced, at the end of June, 82 annual scholarships, through 58 different funds, given to young amateur radio operators totaling more than \$110,000. Scholarships are typically in the amount of \$1,000 or \$2,000 dollars, though a few individual scholarships go as high as \$5,000 and many totaling \$500 are also awarded. One scholarship, the Goldfarb Scholarship, assists the recipient in receiving a four-year undergraduate degree in engineering, science, medical or business-related fields.

Most such scholarships are open to any male or female, licensed amateur radio operator currently in high school. If you know of a high school student who is also a ham, who could benefit from receiving a scholarship, check out the details of all of the scholarships available through the ARRL Foundation here: www.arrl.org/scholarship-descriptions. But, not every kid with a ticket will qualify; some scholarships require applicants to be active in public service amateur radio activities.

CB Amp Distributor Nailed

Ever wonder why those web sites and truck stops selling illegal CB amplifiers and modified CB sets never get tagged by the FCC? It could be because FCC agents are spread thin tracking down FM pirate radio stations and inspecting the public files of legal, non-commercial, low-power, listener-supported stations. But, not all bootleg CB sellers are immune to FCC scrutiny. In early June the FCC issued a Citation and Order (C&O) to The Enterprise Group of Omaha, Nebraska, makers and sellers of ePowerAmps.

FCC agents were shocked, shocked, to find certified CB sets had been doctored to increase power and expand operating frequencies beyond that allowed by FCC rules. Agents found linear amps, which ranged from 120 watts (\$140) to massive 8,200 watt amplifiers (\$2,600), designed to operate on the 10 and 12 meter amateur bands. The FCC noted that continuing to offer such products for sale could result in a fine of not more than \$16,000 for each such violation or each day of continuing violation.